

The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, March 22. 1692.



Quest. 1. **W**hat's your Opinion of Reading or seeing Plays, whether Comedy or Tragedy?

Answe. We are not ignorant with what Zeal and Fer-
vour the Primitive Fathers inveighed against all Plays
in general, especially the being present at 'em; nay,
they generally held that in the very Form of Baptism,
the person Baptiz'd did expressly renounce 'em as included
under the *Pomps and vanities of this wicked World*.
Tho it must be confess'd that most of their arguments
rather bear against their seeing, than reading 'em, (for
we are pretty sure St. Paul himself read 'em, because
he quotes 'em,) and besides, respected 'em as *Sacrifices to Idols*, being a part of that worship which the
Dæmons of the Gentiles requir'd to be paid 'em, and
very acceptable no doubt it was unto 'em. Now this
not holding of our *Modern Plays*, though often zealous-
ly urg'd against 'em, we must look out for some other
Reasons which may make the seeing 'em unlawful; for
that they are so, 'tis not only the Opinion of *Will Pryn*, or the *Dissenters*, but of several excellent *Divines* of the Church of *England* now living. The Reasons which seem to us of any weight, that are brought against 'em, are, their generally representing *Vice* so graphically and lively, dressing it in all the Colours of Rhetorick, and sweets of Fancy and Language; and on the contrary, not only stripping *Virtue* of all her *Beauties*, but rendering her not only deform'd, but what's worse, ridiculous and contemptible; and the many *Oaths* and *Curses*, which are stuck almost as thick in our *Modern Plays*, and indeed in almost all others, as in an *Irish Oration*: Both which are such dangerous incitements to *Vice* and *Irreligion*, that we know not how to recede from their Opinion, who think most of the present Plays unfit to be seen, and not very safe to be read; especially our *Comedies*, which for the most part divert us with *Vice* instead of *Humour*, give us but too exact a Picture of the Age, and to omit others, represent all sorts of *Intemperance*, either as no Crime at all, or as Crimes so small, that they deserve not to be taken notice of. And this runs through most of the *Plays* that ever yet came to our Knowledge. However, 'tis urg'd on t'other side, that these Inconveniences are not *Essential* to Plays, because they are not in *all Plays*, nay not in all *Comedies*: That if the *Tables* were turn'd, *Vice* rendred ridiculous and odious, and *Virtue* amiable and lovely; and where oppres'd for a while, yet at last prosperous and happy, or at least triumphing in *miser*, glorying in its *Sufferings*, and even in Death a Conqueror; in these Circumstances, none cou'd be against 'em with any just reason, since we find the *Drama* used even in *Sacred Writ*, since it can be no Crime to recommend *Virtue* in *Verse* more than *Prose*, nay, it has there a great advantage; and since it can be no greater a fault to give those *moral Argumens* a livelier turn, by fitting such persons to 'em, as may properly and gracefully recite 'em. If therefore instead of making the *Print an Image of Life*, we call'd it, *An Image of what is invisible in Life represented as imitable*; and so on the contrary, there cou'd none sure be Enemies to it who understood themselves. And such it wou'd be, were the *Abbot Hælins Model* only to be follow'd; but were it once brought into that Form, we doubt the Playhouse wou'd soon be as much out of request as the *Churches*, and the price of a *Play* be lower'd to Sixpence as well as that of a *sermon*.

Quest. 2. *A Young Woman, who 'tis not question'd is in the min' Christ enough, yet being unmarried, gives great Encouragement to a Man who is married to a Cross ugly Old Woman that he hates, and whom he does not dwell with, though he allows her a handsome maintenance: She*

keeps him Company, receives presents from him, and is strongly presum'd he promises her Marriage when his Old woman dies, and will no doubt never attempt her Chastity, or do any thing knowingly to lessen her Reputation. Its believ'd they live one another so much, that they are so blinded as not to think their keeping Company, though known to many, is scandalous, or that they are laugh'd at for it: Pray your Judgment as to the honesty of the matter, and how their Friends may awaken them out of this stupidity?

Answe. There are two Questions grounded on the matter of Fact; the former, what we think of the Honesty of such a Correspondence? The latter, how to convince those who maintain it, of the scandal it gives to others. To the former we reply, that we neither think it prudent nor honest: If it gives Scandal, and may have worse effects, it can't be prudent; nor can it be honest either on the Mans part or Womans: 'Tis dishonest to make a Contract for a second Wife while the first is living; nay, supposing they come not so far as a formal *Promise*, to give that Love to her which is due to his Wife, notwithstanding those three displeasing Qualities, *Ugliness*, *Age*, and *Ill-humour*, since for *Deformity* and *Age* they are not *Faults*, because not voluntary; and for *sowrnels of Temper*, 'tis almost as inseparable from *Age* as *Deformity*, being a sort of *Deformity* of the *Mind*, as the other of the *Body*. Besides, its very probable his behaviour to her has given occasion for her being out of *Humour*: For to cross the *Cudgels*, suppose his *Old Wife* shou'd dye, and he marry this *Young one*, it may be his turn then to grow old, and must expect the inseparable *Infirmitie*s of Old Age as well as others, and wou'd he then take it kindly shou'd his *Young Wife* find her a *Young Gallant*, give him *Presents*, keep him Company, and promise him *Marriage* as soon as the *Old man* was grown a little colder, and in the mean while civilly turn him out o' *Doors*, or put him abroad to *Nurse*, without ever coming near him; and wou'd not this be enough to spoil all his good *Humour*, if he had any left?

This for the first Question, the honesty of the Correspondence: Now for the method how their Friends may convince 'em of the *Scandal* thereby given; and here we know no better a way than our old one, send each of 'em one of these *Mercuries*, and it must needs open their *Eyes*, unless little *Cupid* has made 'em as blind as he himself is.

Quest. 3. *Whether Kisses and chaste Embraces may be admitted into that Friendship between different Sexes, which you have formerly mention'd?*

Answe. Hold, good Mr. *Platonique*! not a Lips breadth further, till you have answer'd these Questions, out of which you may make a shift to pick a *Resolution* of your own. 1. Because all agree there are no Sexes in *Souls*, d'ye think there are none in *Bodies*? 2. Or are you *Marble*? 3. Or is your *Friend* of the same substance, or kin to St. *Francis's Wife of Snow*: If not, *Hands off*, unleis *en passant*, as you may embrace or salute a Sister or a Neighbour.

Quest. 4. *A Gentlewoman forc'd by her Guardian to marry one she never liked, steals out after Dinner, and marries one she had long entertain'd as her Servant, who beds her immediately: Query, whose Wife is she? or can the Prime Marriage oblige her so live with him she loves not?*

Answe. Many an unhappy *Marriage* is thus made, and Young Persons ruin'd by the *Treachery* and *Covetousness* of *Guardians*, which its pity can be no way remedy'd. But in the present Case, the *Lady* took an effectual *Course*, though methinks the Day before had been much better than an hour after, if she had any notice of his *Design*. However, if she were really forc'd by her *Guardian*

than to do what she did, there was hardly so much as the Formality of a Formality in the first Obligation, though even that she ought not to have submitted to; and for her Old Servant, he was resolv'd to make sure work, and is much of the better side of the Hedge. If then the former Marriage, (or rather Ceremony) be null and void, as we think the Force makes it, the second must necessarily remain good, and the Lady must be his Wife, whom she was resolv'd to make so sure?

Quest. 5. Two Gentlemen having lately contracted an intimate Acquaintance, the one was desired by the other to deliver a Letter to a Gentlewoman for whom he had a great affection, to reason the Case with her, and to bring him an Answer, which he did, but not to his Friends satisfaction, for she was very positive, and said she'd have nothing to say to him; he receiving this Answer by his Friend, went himself and return'd with the like success, insomuch that he despair'd of ever prevailing with her, since which time the other Gentleman has made his Addresses to her, and has acquainted his Friend how far he has proceeded: But he's very much offended, says 'tis treacherous and ungenerous, and that he has transgress'd the Rules of Friendship. You are desired speedily to give your Opinion in the matter?

Answ. The mischief is, that very few of these Love Queries will keep cold; they are all for so much speed that they crowd out one another, and we see no way to avoid it, particularly in this, we know not but the Friends may have fought and run one another through the Lungs half a dozen times before our Answer comes to unite 'em: However, if Battle and Murder has not yet follow'd, we hope this may prevent it, at least do so in any other such like occasion: For which end we reply, that we must confess our selves of the rejected Gentleman's side, and think his Friend has neither dealt handsomly nor generously by him, and need appeal no further than to his own Thoughts, whether he'd have taken it kindly himself had the other so supplanted him? With design or without at first, is not the Question; for his Friend employ'd him, he was a Trustee for him, he of all the World ought not to injure him in an Affair of so tender a Concern. Its true, there are not many as the World now goes, that wou'd scruple such a piece of Treachery, especially it for their advantage; however, we must not state the Rules of Friendship by custom, but by Generosity, Justice and Reason.

Quest. 6. I was sometime since contracted to a Lady of Beauty, Wit, and reputed Virtue, but a little before the time appointed for Marriage, I found her my self in Bed with a Young Fellow, and have no room to doubt of her dishonesty: The Query is, whether I'm now bound to perform my Contract?

Answ. No certainly, unless you have a fancy to be Chronicled for a Contented one, since had you bin actually marry'd, this Crime had dissolv'd the Contract, much more when 'twas before Consummation.

Quest. 7. A Person reasonably well qualified in one course of Study, which he has addidcted the most part of his Life to, but without any other qualification of Breeding, or Learning whatsoever; is puff'd up with an insufferable Pride, insomuch as to despise and affront his Acquaintance, tho' in general they are of better Fortune, Quality and Learning than himself: Query, how prudentially to bring this Man to a true Knowledge of himself, and to right Reason?

Answ. The End of Learning is the Good of Society, the real happiness of the Person that enjoys it; and what is't, if such a use of it as acknowledges it to be tributary to the Author of all Knowledge. Now every Learned Man either does or does not answer these ends; if the first, he has Learn'd in vain, and who can't be ashamed of such an egregious Folly: If the last, 'tis what he has receiv'd by a Mediate Chain of Causes, which Heaven had ty'd such and such Effects to, and if so, the old Rule is good, *Quanto Dolor es, tanto te geras Submissus*, which Maxton is founded on this Reason, Shou'd any Man despise his Neighbours, because he's a greater Debtor to God Almighty than they are? — This will convince your Friend if he is not a hater of thinking; if he be, he is past recovery.

Quest. 8. Gentlemen, you say that the Numbers 2, 1, 2, 5 and 3 are in an inverted Proportion: I cannot see

that they are in any Proportion, either Direct, Inverse, duplicate, Trible, or any other, unless in a proportion inverse to all Reason and Truth; and therefore I desire to know how you make them what you assert, or that you would never expose your Ignorance to the World, which in my Opinion you have sufficiently done in sundry Respects in the Quest. above mentioned?

Answ. Pray Sir don't be angry till you look upon the last Number again, and see whether it be a decimal Fraction or no, as well as half the third; afterwards try again whether the Numbers are not proportionable according to the Rule of Three Inverse, if they are not, we are *Fru sumponum*, &c. if they are, we thank you for your Generous Correction; but being confident of the first, we have this to tell you, that as revers'd Letters suppose a reverse Sence, so some Abuses are Panegyricks. A Universal Praise is the greatest Scandal in the World.

Quest. 9. The Questions concerning Punch, Cards, Books written by a Person of Quality, Corns, Religion, Cheese, Tripewomans Daughter, Marriages without License, Penurious old Hunks, why we call a single week a Sevennight, and 2 weeks a Fortnight, what was the Ceremony used at the Baptism for the dead, whether the Lords Day be of Divine Institution, and whether Bull-baitings, &c. shall according to our promise be answer'd next Saturday, together with all those mention'd in our last Mercury, that so by answering all Questions whatever we may render our Undertaking perfect.

We having receiv'd 2 Ingenious Poems, one from a Person Aged and in Love, the other concerning Eve in Paradise, both which are unhappily lost, We desire the Gentleman wou'd be at the trouble to send 'em again; and the same favour we desire from a Gentleman at Derby, as to two or three Questions in Prose concerning the Eternity of the World.

We had here according to our Promise inserted our Project concerning the *Natural and Artificial Rarities of England, and other Countries*, but that several Ingenious Gentlemen (well skill'd in those Affairs) generously offering to contribute their assistance therein, upon which account, that the said undertaking may be the more serviceable to the publick, we defer the publication of till next Tuesday.

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